



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES NEWSLETTER

October 2007

## The Hispanic Community and Domestic Violence

*Victim feels pressure from the community and family not to say anything about the abuse*

*This is the fourth in a series of newsletters focusing on the issue of culture and domestic violence. The Office of Family Violence understands that experiences of domestic violence vary from person to person. These newsletters hope to offer a glimpse into how someone from a particular community or culture may see and experience domestic violence differently from another. Our fourth newsletter focuses on the Hispanic community. Soffia Fraser, Outreach Specialist with the Alexandria Office on Women talked to Urmila Oberoi about what some of the women who seek services from the organization face when dealing with domestic violence.*

**Urmila Oberoi (UO):** Can you talk a little bit about the unique cultural issues survivors in your community are dealing with when it comes to domestic violence?

**Soffia Fraser (SF):** Sometimes there is the idea that in the Hispanic culture domestic violence is okay, and that for a man to hit a woman is not a very serious offense. That is not the case, however. The vast majority of people know that this should not be done. What happens, though, is very similar to most cases of gender based violence, like rape, in that the victim often feels strong psychological pressures from the family, the ethnic community, and society at large not to say anything about her abuse. There is a thinking that it is not a good thing to say what is going on because the admission casts shame on the person and the victim's family. Women sometimes think, "what will my neighbor think for talking about my family life?"

**UO:** Do you feel that there are still stigmas attached to reporting domestic violence in your communities?

**SF:** The stigma comes in when women are seen as "allowing" this to happen in their family. They are afraid that people will think, "how can you allow this to happen in your family?" There is the idea that everything should be perfect and when it isn't, the women feel a sense of failure. Especially if the family is well-respected in the commu-

nity, there is that stigma that nothing should break up the family.

**UO:** Does religion play a role in compelling women to stay in abusive relationships in your community? How so?

**SF:** I don't think that's the case for the Hispanic community in the U.S. On the contrary, the church certainly can have a lot of influence in these cases because it can become an important source of information about the victim's rights and can build their self-esteem. If the abuser is afraid the victim will get good advice from those in the church on how to confront the situation, the abuser often sees this as a loss of control. That is why the abuser often tries to isolate and control the woman and prevent her from getting outside advice. The most important thing, whether it is from the church or from somewhere else, is helping the victim to get help she needs. The other family members should also have a broad range of support when dealing with the indirect affects of abuse and domestic violence.

**UO:** Can you talk a bit about the immigration piece and how it fits into your community?

**SF:** The first thing is that I don't think that the victim should be victimized twice-once for being abused, and again for her immigration status. Immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, often have a feeling of rejection

and fear that they will be deported if they report the incident and it comes to the knowledge of the authorities. The abuser frequently uses the immigration tool as a threat to keep the victim in the house and under control. People also hear things about police arresting men and women and that gets them even more afraid. There are also the children to consider and the abuser will often say that he will call immigration and not only get the woman deported, but keep the children with him.

**UO:** What kinds of things can domestic violence programs do to be more conscious of those who come into their shelters seeking services? What kinds of things should they be asking at the intake level to be more sensitive to the cultural needs of a woman?

**SF:** Programs should be aware of a person's cultural background and be really careful about what they ask at intake. Asking about the person's beliefs, what the victim thinks about domestic violence, and what their country thinks of abuse are all good ways to understand what cultural attitudes the woman is coming from.

**UO:** Has it gotten better? Have you seen an improvement in the number of women who are reporting abuse and leaving?

**SF:** I believe the number of women reporting abuse is getting better. It seems women in our area are better aware of the services because they are getting more information from a variety of sources. Our program here in Alexandria has court advocacy and support groups in Spanish and English which I think is very helpful. The key is to go into the community and tell people about the work that the domestic violence programs do.

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### **Office of Family Violence (OFV)**

The Office of Family Violence (OFV) funds local public and private non-profit domestic violence programs whose mission and purpose are to address the issue of domestic violence within their community and respond to the needs of all people in that community who have experienced and/or been impacted by domestic violence.

OFV values the provision of consistent reliable services for victims and children in every locality of the Commonwealth. With the recent adoption of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Agency Accreditation manual, the funding priorities of the OFV will shift toward fully accredited programs.

Accredited domestic violence programs provide hotline, information and referral, crisis intervention, safety planning, emergency companion services, emergency transportation, individual support services, legal advocacy, support groups, children's services, community coordination and systems advocacy, community education, emergency housing services and outreach and access for underserved populations. For more information on Accreditation please see:

<http://www.vsdvalliance.org>.

**\*Many of the Domestic Violence programs in Virginia also offer services in Spanish.**

### **Resources to go to for More Information on the Hispanic Community and Domestic Violence:**

#### **AYUDA**

1707 Kalorama Rd. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
Phone: 202-387-4848  
Website: <http://www.ayudainc.org>

#### **Hispanic Committee of Virginia (HCV)**

5827 Columbia Pike, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Falls Church, VA 22041  
Phone: 703-671-5666  
Website: <http://www.hcva.org>

#### **La Clinica del Pueblo** (counseling and support for battered Hispanic and immigrant women)

2831 15th St., NW  
Washington, DC 20009  
Phone: 202-462-4788  
Website: <http://www.lcdp.org/English/Home.html>